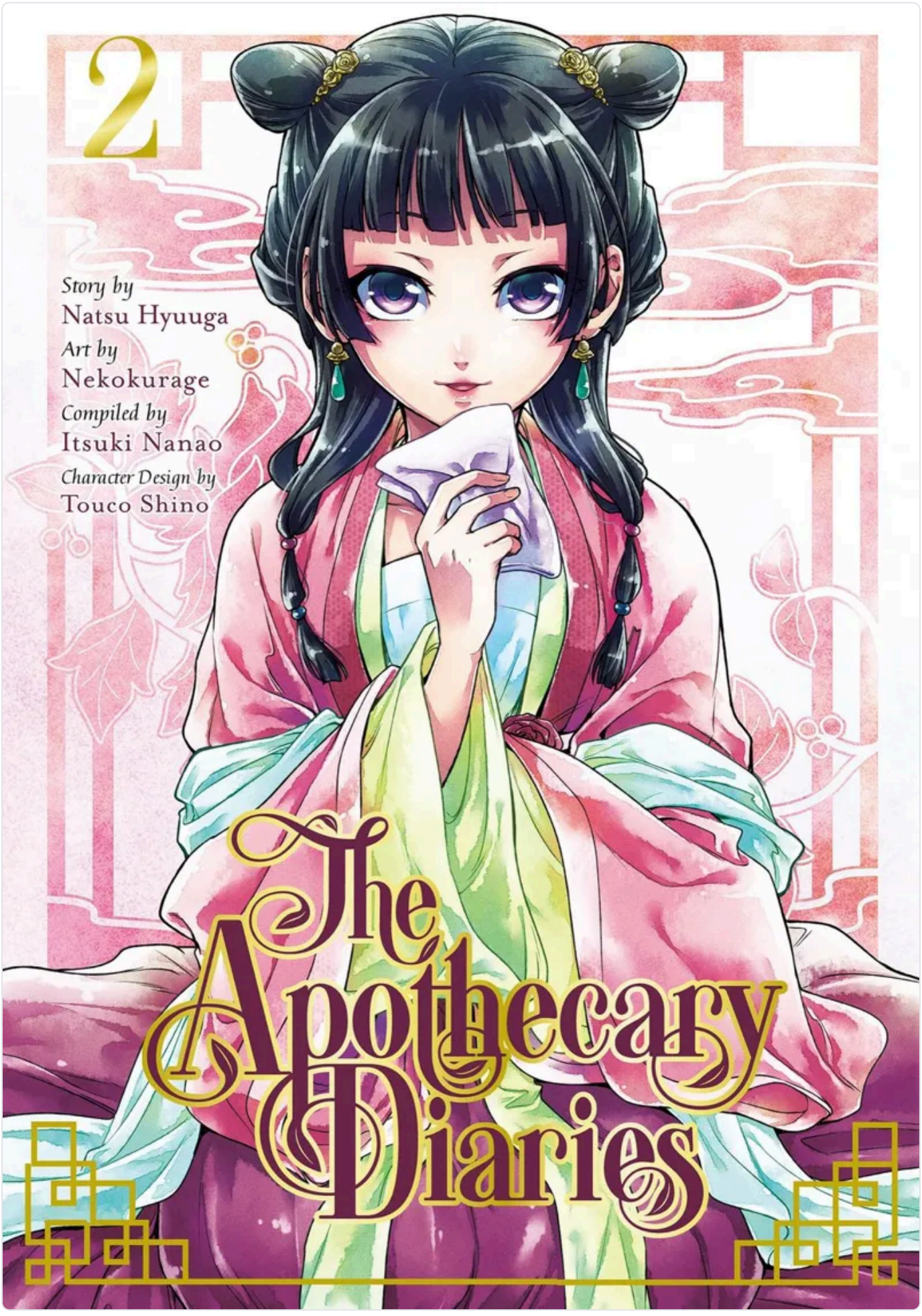
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The Apothecary Diaries

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The Apothecary Diaries

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ONE NIGHT, WHEN THE EMPEROR WAS VISITING THE JADE PALACE...
THEN I SHALL TAKE MY LEAVE, YOUR MAJESTY.
WAIT.
I HAVE A REQUEST FOR THE APOTH-ECARY...
...ABOUT WHOM I'VE HEARD SO MUCH.
...HIS MAJESTY ADDRESSED ME FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.
...HE'S HEARD ABOUT ME?
THIS CAN'T BE GOOD.

Chapter 5 Caring for the Consort

CONSORT LIHUA FARES POORLY.
I WOULD LIKE YOU TO ATTEND TO HER FOR THE PRESENT.
"ATTEND TO HER..." IN OTHER WORDS...
.....
...HE WANTS ME TO CURE HER.
AS YOU WISH, YOUR MAJ-ESTY.
I WOULD PREFER TO KEEP MY HEAD ATTACHED TO MY BODY FOR A WHILE YET.
ペコッ
BOW
BUT THE EMPEROR'S WORD IS THE WORD OF HEAVEN.

BRINGING UP THIS SUBJECT IN FRONT OF ANOTHER CONSORT...
STILL...
HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY ...
...REALLY IS AN IMPERIOUS BEING, THROUGH AND THROUGH.
THE NEXT DAY, AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE...
7

ガシャーン
CRASH
THE AUDAC-ITY!
YOU DARE TRY TO SERVE SUCH PEASANT FOOD...
...TO CONSORT LIHUA?!
CLATTER
カラ
SIGH
CLATTER
カラ

BACK TO THE KITCHENS WITH YOU!
HEE HEE!
HEE HEE!
HEE HEE!
HOW DARE YOU WASTE FOOD LIKE THIS?
THAT'S WHAT I FIND AUDA-CIOUS.
HMPH!
UGH.
WHAT A PAIN.
SIGH
...WAS TO IMPROVE HER DIET.
THE FIRST STEP I TOOK TO NURSE CONSORT LIHUA BACK TO HEALTH...

NOW THAT SHE WON'T BE FURTHER EXPOSED TO THE POISON ...
...THE PRIORITY IS TO ELIMINATE WHAT REMAINS IN HER BODY.
NO ONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET THEIR HANDS ON IT ANY-MORE.
THE FACE POWDER FROM THE "CURSE" INCIDENT HAS SINCE BEEN BANNED.
THE MERCHANT SELLING IT WAS HARSHLY PUNISHED TOO.
FRUIT TO AID DIGES-TION...
TEA WITH A DIURETIC EFFECT TO FLUSH OUT HER SYSTEM ...
POR-RIDGE HIGH IN FIBER...
...AND I EVEN HAD A MEAL PREPARED TO HELP HER BODY PURGE THE TOXIN...
I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HERE BY VIRTUE OF THE EMPEROR'S DIRECT ORDER...
THIS ISN'T GOOD FOR HER. NOR IS THIS, THIS, OR THAT...

...MUST REALLY DISLIKE ME.
...THE LADIES-IN-WAITING HERE...
TEE-HEE!
TEE-HEE!
MESSY
べちゃ
...SO FOR THEM TO DO THIS MEANS ...
FOR HIS MAJESTY TO ASK ME, A YOUNG GIRL, OF ALL PEOPLE, FOR HELP...
JUST HOW UNRELIABLE IS THAT INNER COURT PHYSICIAN?
OR MAYBE ...
DOES HE STILL HAVE FEELINGS FOR HER?
OR IS IT BECAUSE SHE'S THE DAUGHTER OF A POWERFUL FAMILY AND CAN'T BE IGNORED?

...SHE'S SO FAR GONE THAT IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER?
HMPH!
SHE'S SERVING UP THE USUAL, I SEE.
SWISH
AS THINGS STAND, I'LL NEVER EVEN BE ABLE TO GET NEAR THE CONSORT.
WHATEVER THE CASE, IT'S A CARELESS REQUEST.
12

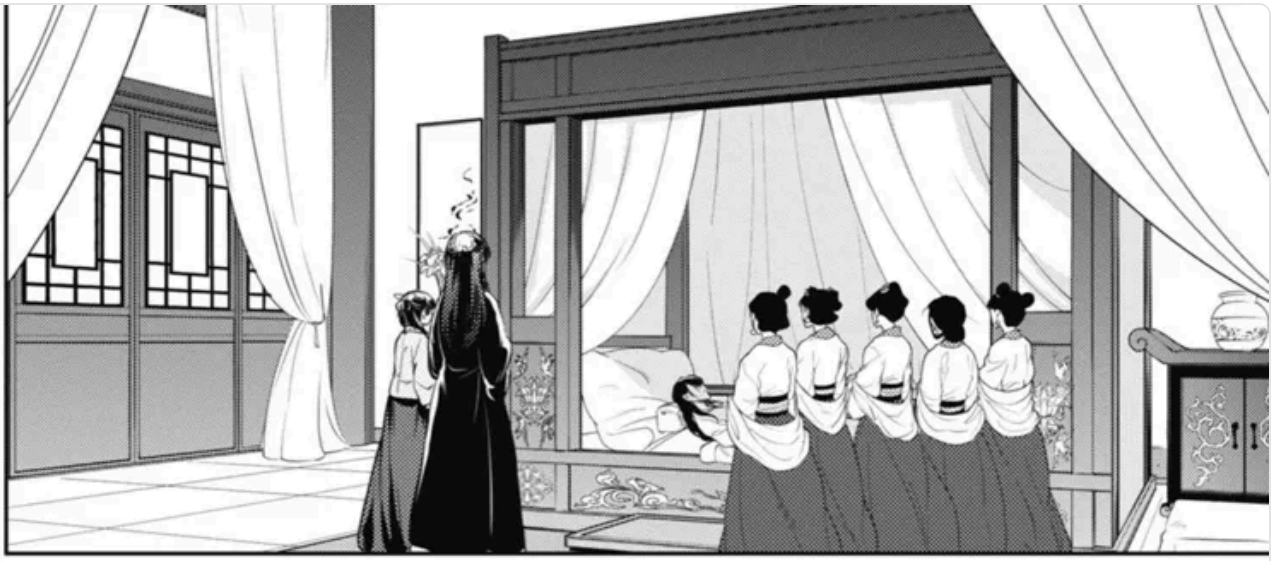
CONSORT LIHUA'S TYPICAL MEALS ARE CERTAINLY NUTRITIOUS ...
...BUT THEY'RE TOO MUCH FOR A SICK PERSON'S DELICATE STOMACH TO HANDLE.
I'M SURE THE TRAY WILL RETURN WITH THE FOOD UNEATEN AGAIN.
HER LADIES COULD FIGURE IT OUT FOR THEMSELVES WITH SOME THOUGHT.
MY LADY ?!
KOFF!
KOFF!

GET OUT ALREADY!
TOSS
ぽーい
.....
...WHO CAN'T EVEN CLEAN UP HER OWN MESS!
IT MUST BE BECAUSE SHE'S BREATHING THE SAME AIR AS THIS LOWLY PEASANT...
SIIIGH
UNLESS SOME-THING CHANGES ...
...ONLY CERTAIN DEATH BY EMACIATION AWAITS THE CONSORT.

...PERHAPS SHE'S ALREADY LOST THE WILL TO LIVE.
PERHAPS IT'S TOO LATE TO GET THE POISON OUT OF HER...
...OR...
HOW MANY MORE DAYS BEFORE MY HEAD...
...HAS TO BID FARE-WELL TO MY BODY?
YOUR FACE SAYS THERE'S SOMETHING TROUBLING YOU.

IT DOES, INDEED.
OH, DOES IT, NOW?
ムカ
ANNOYED
SHE'S WITH SIR JINSHI ...
THE NERVE OF THAT GIRL!
ゴゴゴゴ
ゴゴ
RRRUUUMBLE
URK!
NOW THEY'VE GOT THE WRONG IDEA ABOUT US, GREAT...
ず
LEAN

WHY DON'T WE GO INSIDE FOR THE TIME BEING?
.....
HMM...
RAGE
RAGE
GYA
AAH!
SMILE
DIS-DAINING THE EMPEROR'S WILL...
...SIMPLY DOES NOT SUIT SUCH BEAUTIFUL AND WISE WOMEN AS YOURSELVES.
WH—
WHY, YOU'RE MOST CERTAINLY RIGHT!
EEE!
AAAH!



OFF YOU GO, THEN.
ぽんっ PAT

PARDON ME, MY LADY.
BOW ペコ

STROKE
スゥッ
!
HER SKIN IS SMOOTH ...?
IT'S THE SAME SHADE AS THE POWDER FROM BEFORE ...
ボソッ MUMBLE

GLARE
SHP
LURCH
LURCH
LURCH
WHAT'S YOUR PROB-LEM?!
...CON-SORT LIHUA'S MAKE-UP?
IS IT YOU WHO DOES...

HMPH!
THAT'S MY JOB AS HER LADY-IN-WAITING, AFTER ALL.
I SEE.
I WANT CONSORT LIHUA TO BE BEAUTIFUL ALWAYS, NO MATTER HER CONDITION.
YES, THAT'S RIGHT.
SLAP

AAAGH!
THROB
ドク
THROB
ドク
I'M MERELY PUNISHING HER FOR HER IDIOCY.
HRN?
WHAT WAS THAT FOR?!
AH!
ナデ
YANK

RIP
RIP
OWW!
THAT HURTS!
OW!
ずり
DRAG
DRAG
ずり
DRAG
ずり
DRAG
ずり
ぱっ
WHOOSH
23

KOFF!
KOFF!
IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE THE POISON MAKES ITS WAY AROUND YOUR ENTIRE BODY.
PWAFF

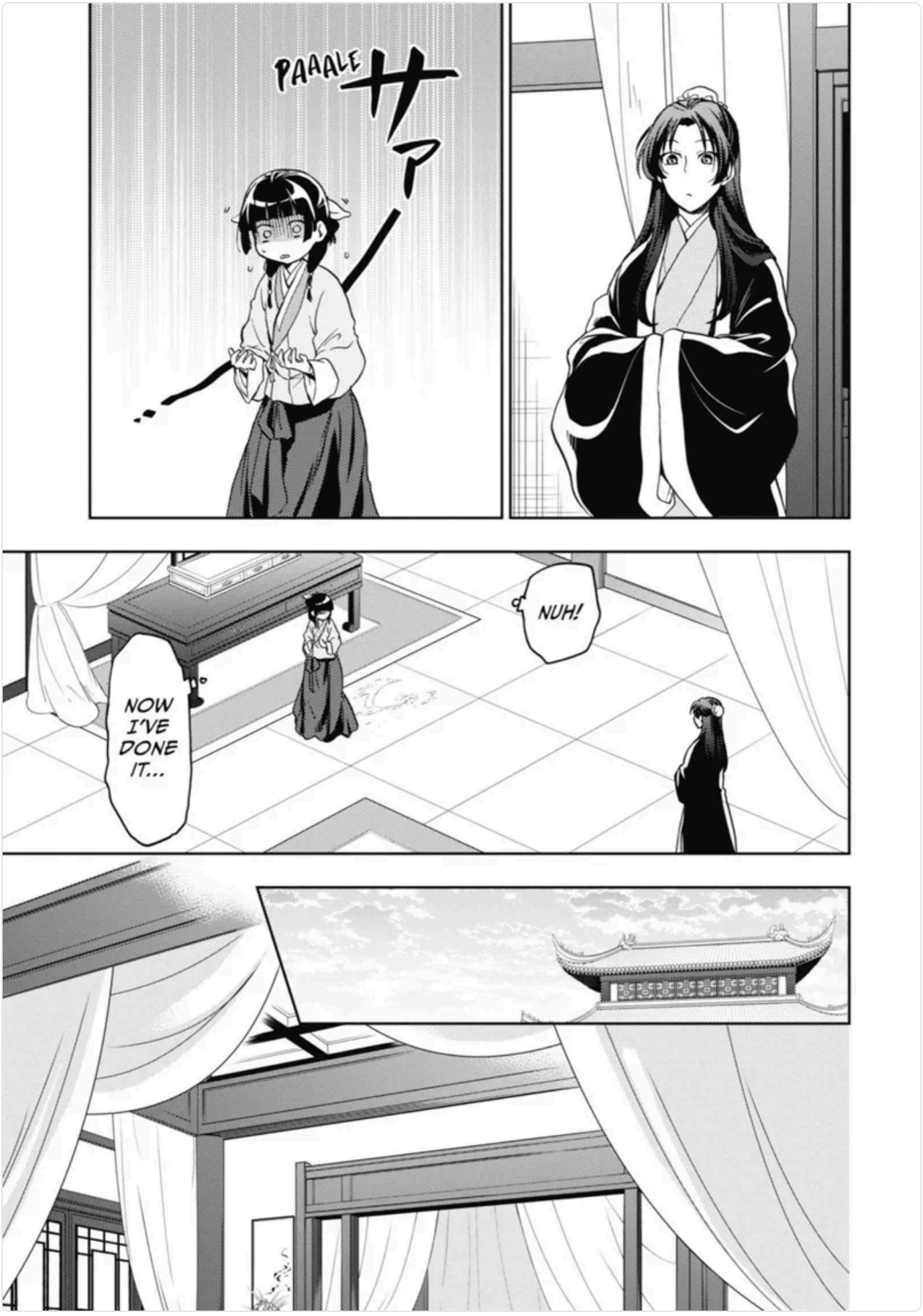
NOW YOU CAN BE BEAUTIFUL TOO...
AREN'T YOU GLAD?
YOUR EYES WILL SINK INTO YOUR SKULL...
...AND SOON...
...YOU TOO WILL HAVE A BODY THAT CAN'T HANDLE SO MUCH AS A MORSEL PASSING BETWEEN YOUR LIPS.
...JUST LIKE YOUR BELOVED CONSORT LIHUA.

DO YOU KNOW WHY THEY BANNED THIS STUFF?
IT'S POISON!
B-BUT...
...IT'S JUST THE PRETTI-EST.
I THOUGHT MY LADY WOULD BE PLEASED ...
SO YOU CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO USE YOUR HEAD...
...BUT YOU'RE CONVINCED YOU'RE IN THE RIGHT?
27

GRAB
RUB
RUB
I ASK YOU THIS.
WHO WOULD BE PLEASED ABOUT THE POISON THAT TOOK THE LIFE OF THEIR OWN CHILD?!

NOW GO RINSE OUT YOUR MOUTH...
...AND WASH YOUR FACE.
ヘロ FWIK
ピク JUMP
YOU LOT!
WE CAN'T HAVE THIS STUFF AFFECTING OUR SICK PATIENT.
RUSH RUSH RUSH バタバタ
POINT ピッ
CLEAN UP THE MESS ON THIS FLOOR ALREADY.
SIGH
R—
RIGHT AWAY!

IMPRESSED
WOMEN ARE TRULY...
...FRIGHT-ENING.
AGH!

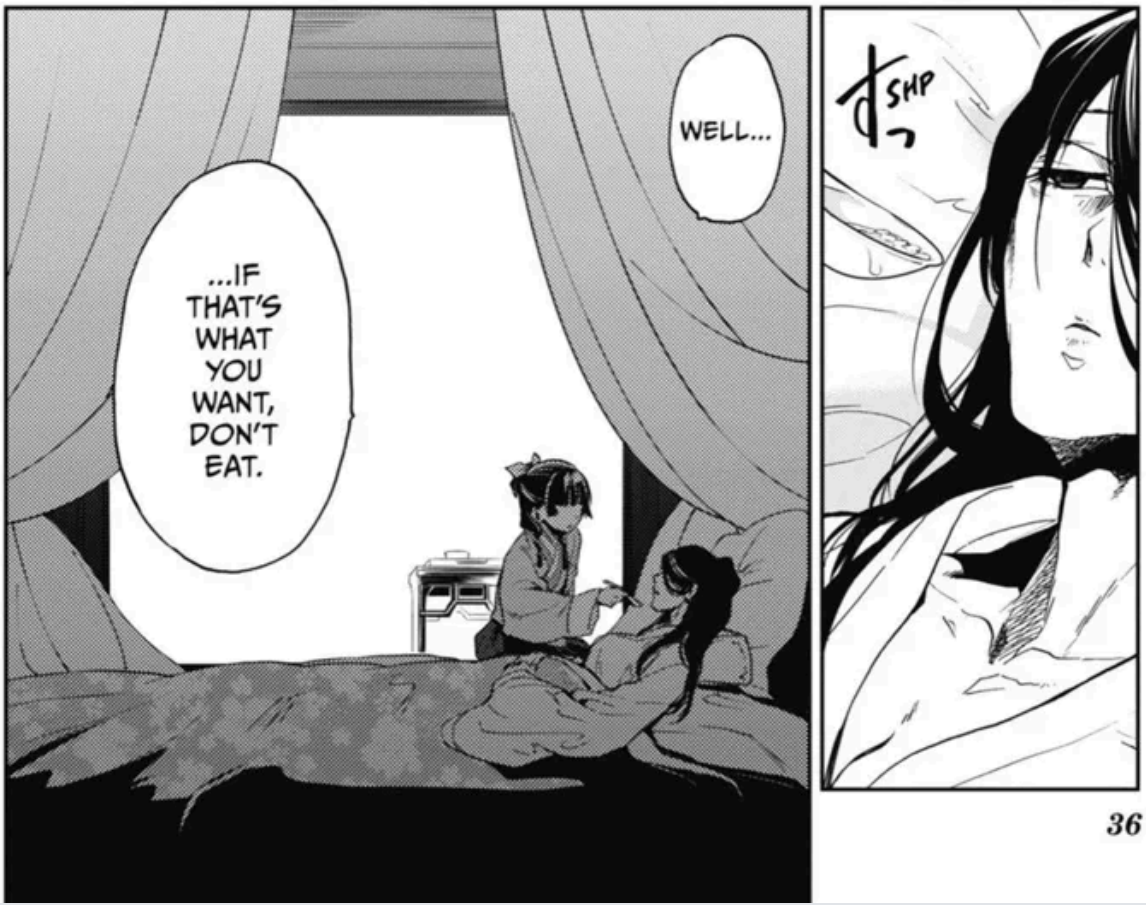

PAAALE
NUH!
NOW I'VE DONE IT...

CON-
SORT
LIHUA'S
CONDI-
TION...
...WAS FAR
WORSE
THAN I'D
IMAGINED.
I REMADE THE
MULTIGRAIN
PORRIDGE
TO BE
THINNER...
...BUT SHE
SHOWED
NO SIGN
OF TAKING
THE FOOD
FROM THE
SPOON.
I HAD NO
CHOICE
BUT TO
PRY OPEN
HER MOUTH
AND FORCE
THE GRUEL
DOWN HER
THROAT.
I DID THIS
OVER AND
OVER, WITH
PATIENCE
VERGING
ON PIG-
HEADED-
NESS.
YOU
CAN'T
HEAL IF
IF YOU
DON'T
EAT.

WHEN I AIRED OUT THE CONSORT'S BEDCHAMBER...
...THE INCENSE BURNED BY HER WOMEN TO MASK BAD ODORS FADED...
...AND THE SMELL OF HER SICK BODY BECAME UNMISTAKABLE.
YOU'RE TELLING ME THOSE GOOD-FOR-NOTHINGS...
GRR!
...HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN PROPERLY WIPING THEIR MISTRESS DOWN?
EEP!
GET ME A BUCKET OF WARM WATER AND SOME CLOTH.
GRIT
YOU ALL GET IN HERE TOO.

...
...OCCA-SIONALLY CHANGING IT OUT WITH A THIN BROTH.
THE GREATER FREQUENCY OF URINA-TION...
...WOULD CLEANSE HER BODY OF THE POISON.
I MADE THE CONSORT DRINK TEA WHENEVER POSSIBLE ...
...I REIN-TRODUCED SOUP AND GRATED FRUIT INTO HER DIET.
AND WHEN SHE COULD GET THE MEAL DOWN ON HER OWN...
...I GRADUALLY INCREASED THE AMOUNT OF RICE IN THE BROTH.
AS SHE BECAME ABLE TO INGEST MORE FOOD IN ONE SITTING ...

.....
WH...
.....IE?
CLINK
カチャ
?
WHY DIDN'T YOU...
...JUST LET ME DIE?


WELL...
...IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT, DON'T EAT.
SHP

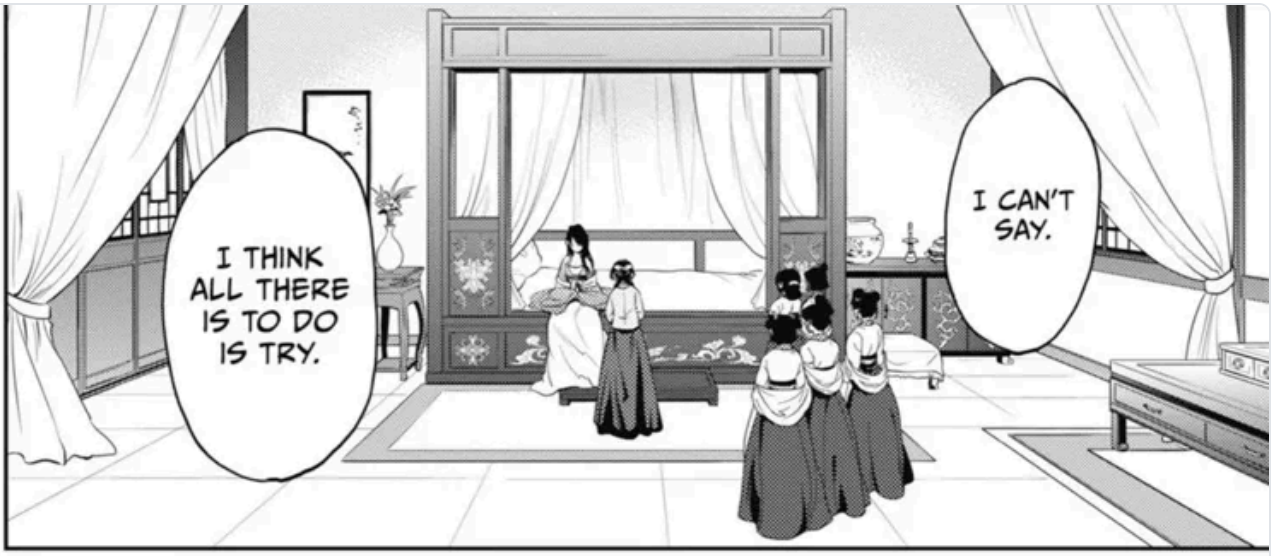
GULP
THE FACT THAT YOU'RE EATING THIS PORRIDGE...
...TELLS ME YOU DON'T WANT TO DIE.

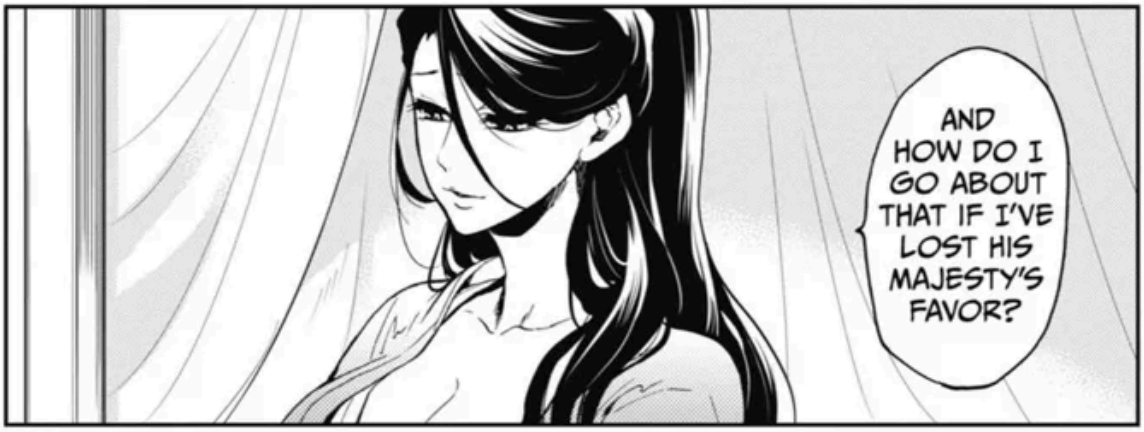
OH.....
...I SEE.

LATER, I HEARD THE EUNUCH WHO FAILED TO CONFISCATE ALL THE FACE POWDER WAS FLOGGED AS PUNISHMENT...
...AND THAT LADY-IN-WAITING WAS ORDERED CONFINED TO HER QUARTERS.
AFTER ABOUT TWO MONTHS OF MY LIVING AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE...
...AND HELPING CONSORT LIHUA RID HER BODY OF THE POISON...

...SHE FINALLY GREW WELL ENOUGH TO GO OUT FOR A WALK.
AS LONG AS SHE ISN'T EXPOSED TO ANY NEW TOXINS ...
...I'D SAY SHE'S WELL ON HER WAY TO RECOVERY NOW.
I THOUGHT SHE'D START HURLING ABUSE AT ME ONCE SHE GOT BETTER...
...BUT THAT HASN'T HAPPENED.
SHE MAY BE PROUD, BUT ARROGANT, SHE'S NOT.

AFTER SEEING HER ACT OUT DURING THE SITUATION WITH THE CROWN PRINCE, I ASSUMED SHE WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A STUCK-UP PRINCESS.
BUT THE TRUTH IS...
...HER CHARACTER IS MORE THAN SUITABLE FOR SOMEONE OF HER RANK.
TELL ME...
WILL I EVER BE ABLE TO BEAR CHILDREN AGAIN?


I THINK ALL THERE IS TO DO IS TRY.
I CAN'T SAY.


AND HOW DO I GO ABOUT THAT IF I'VE LOST HIS MAJESTY'S FAVOR?

ONCE I RETURN TO THE JADE PALACE ...
...I IMAGINE THE EMPEROR WILL COME VISIT YOU AGAIN, MY LADY.
WHETHER HE DOES SO FOR POLITICAL REASONS OR SENTIMENTAL ONES IS ANOTHER STORY.

HIS MAJESTY'S ORDERS ARE THE REASON I'M HERE AT ALL.

IN THE WORK-INGS OF THE INNER COURT ...
...LOVE AND AFFECTION HAVE NO PLACE.
CAN A WOMAN SUCH AS I, WHO FAILED TO HEED THE WARNINGS ...
...AND ALLOWED MY OWN CHILD TO DIE BEFORE MY VERY EYES...
...POSSIBLY WIN AGAINST CONSORT GYOKUYO?
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF WINNING OR LOSING.
43

THE WORLD IS FULL OF ALL KINDS OF FLOWERS...
...BUT IF YOU WERE TO ASK WHICH ARE MORE BEAUTIFUL, PEONIES OR IRISES...
...I DON'T BELIEVE ANYONE COULD SAY FOR SURE, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.
BUT I HAVE NEITHER EYES OF JADE NOR SUNSET-KISSED HAIR...
JIGGLE

DEPRESSED
しゅん…
……
I THINK YOU HAVE CERTAIN OTHER CHARMS TO SEE YOU THROUGH, MY LADY.
THEIR SHEER BOUNTY ALONE, FOR ONE… ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THEIR SHAPE AND BOUNCE…
BOING
ばいーん
BOING
ばいーん
THEY ARE YOUR GREATEST ASSET.
LEND ME YOUR EAR A MOMENT, WON'T YOU?
OH?
VERY WELL.

WELL, THEN...
ぽんっ
POOF
BLUSH
ぽわわ
I SHALL DEPART IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING.
BOW
ペコッ
MY PARTING GIFT TO CONSORT LIHUA...
...WAS WHAT THE LADIES OF THE PLEASURE DISTRICT...
LISTLESS
NOW, MAOMAO ...
THERE'S NO HARM IN YOU LEARNING THIS TOO!
...CALL A "SECRET ART."

CONSORT LIHUA, HOWEVER, CAN MAKE MORE THAN GOOD USE OF IT.
HEH!
...I HAVEN'T THE MELONS REQUIRED FOR THAT TRICK.
TOO BAD FOR ME...
THERE-AFTER...
...HIS MAJESTY'S VISITS TO THE JADE PALACE DROPPED OFF DRAS-TICALLY.
IT WASN'T MENTION OF THE EMPEROR'S VIGOR THAT CAUSED MAOMAO TO AVERT HER EYES, BUT SOME-THING ELSE ENTIRELY.
.....
PHEW!
HOW NICE IT IS TO BE GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP AGAIN!
48